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ABSTRACT

Mississippi's Education Reform Act of 1982 calls for developing a performance-based school accreditation system that applies research findings on school effectiveness. This paper describes the conceptual model, the proposed accreditation process, and the field testing plan developed by the Performance-Based School Assessment Task Force. The model depicts quality education as the positive effects of five effective performance characteristics (active educational leadership, instructionally focused organization, effective instruction, change inducing staff development, and positive school climate) on four educational functions: (1) promoting basic skills proficiency for all students; (2) inducing positive attitudes toward learning; (3) providing continuing exposure to new knowledge; and (4) encouraging sustained involvement in successful learning experience. Each of a district's schools will be numerically rated on their performance level. Local school boards must develop 5-year educational plans for improvement if found deficient. Four instruments are being developed employing document analysis, observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Validity will be investigated through comparison to other instruments and a field testing of the system with a 10 percent sample of school districts in the fall of 1985. (BS)

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A NEW MODEL FOR SCHOOL ACCREDITATION: APPLYING SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS MEASURES TO ASSESS EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

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Paper Presented at the
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A New Model for School Accreditation: Applying School Effectiveness Measures to Assess Educational Quality

Introduction and Background

American education has entered into an era of reform. Public interest in and concern for the quality of educational programs has been fueled by the findings of several national studies of education that consistently have called upon the schools to do a better job of equipping students with the skills needed for contributing productively to American society.[1] Professional interest in and concern for the quality of educational programs has been stimulatd by research that has identified and described schools in which students are achieving beyond expectations.[2] The combined influence of these two sources of concern has generated a flurry of activity on the part of federal and state education policymakers, resulting in many cases in mandates for educational reform initiatives (Odden and Dougherty, 1982; Miles and Farrar, and Neufeld. 1983).

State education policymakers have chosen many routes in attempting to improve student performance. Some states rely on legislative mandates for more instructional time and stiffer graduation requirements; others seek to provide technical assistance and supportive aid to schools and teachers (Odden and Odden, 1984). Most try to apply the findings of educational research concerned with identifying factors associated with higher levels of performance to a model for school improvement.

Only in recent years has educational research yielded reliable information about indicators of educational quality. Prior to the 1960's and 1970's, researchers focused on the quantitative resources available to schools and found no school factors that were significantly related to student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966). When the research emphasis shifted to in-depth analyses of processes and practices in schools that were successful in raising achievement scores for low incomes and minority students, a profile of characteristics of effective schools began to emerge (Cohen, 1983). This accumulating research base provides information on the characteristics of teachers, principals, organizational structures and processes in schools that are effective in improving student achievement.[3]

Mississippi joined the push for quality improvements in education with the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1982. Among other initiatives, this law calls for the development of a system of performance-based school accreditation that applies the research findings on school effectiveness. Two years for developing and field testing the new accreditation system are provided before compliance with the law becomes mandatory in 1986.

It is interesting that accreditation was chosen as the vehicle for Mississippi's education reform program, because the history of accreditation emphases mirrors the history of educational research emphases. Accreditation

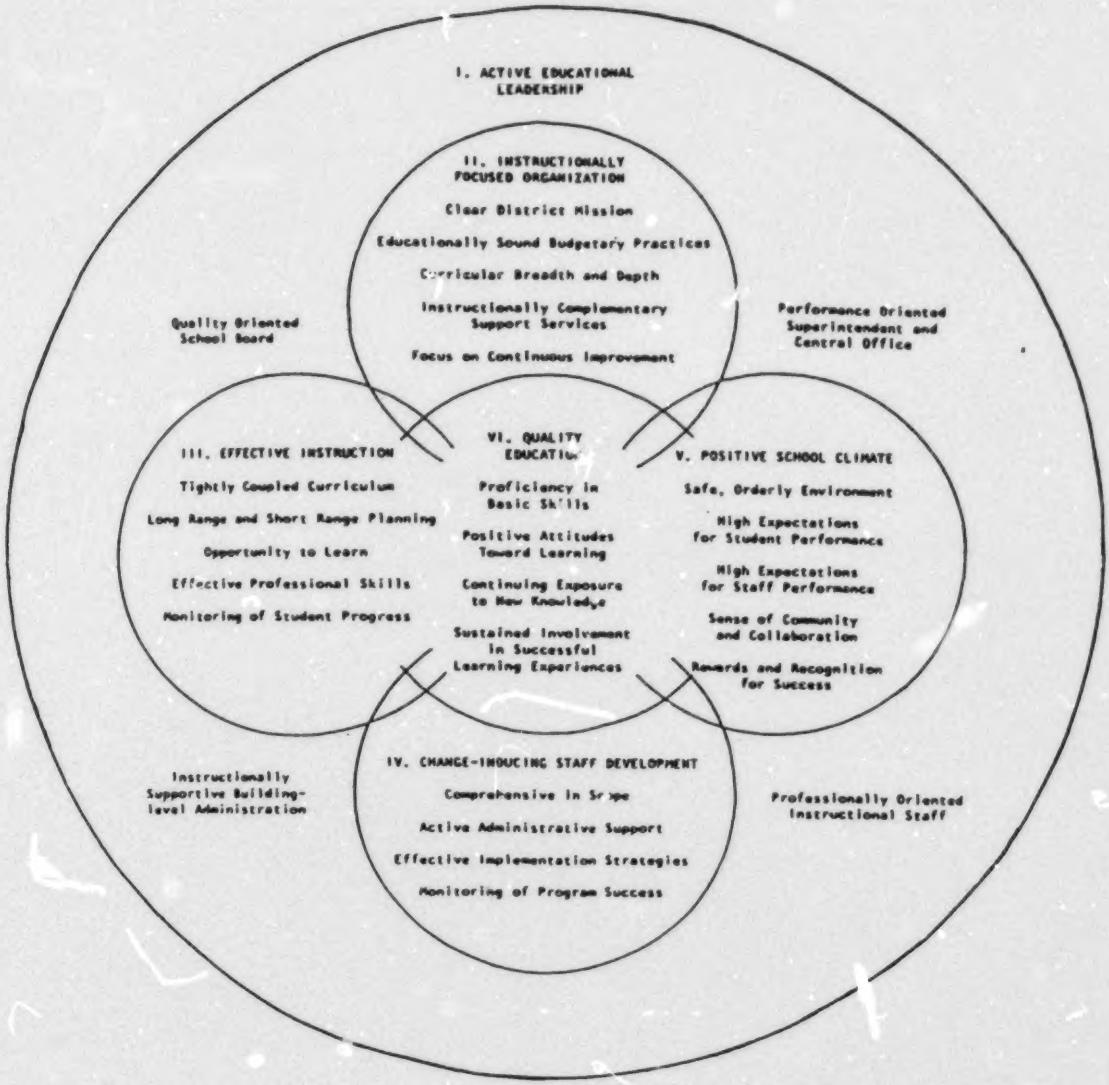
was originally established as a means of protecting the public against unqualified medical practitioners. Over the years, it has become a way of promoting quality in edcational programs by assuring that certain standards have been met and that programs satisfy minimum expectations (Stedman, 1980). Initial efforts in educational accreditation focused upon quantitative factors, such as resources and personnel, as measures of school quality. In recent years, traditional accreditation systems have been roundly criticized for their failure to indicate whether students in accredited school programs are mastering curriculum content and learning objectives. Program developers have been urged to move from quantitative measures of program quality to qualitative measures that take into account the effectiveness with which schools use their resources and personnel to help students learn.

In Mississippi, the Performance-Based School Assessment Task Force (Task Force) was charged with developing a plan for incorporating the findings of school effectiveness research into a performance-based accreditation system. The remainder of this paper will describe the conceptual model developed by the Task Force, the proposed accreditation process, and the plan for developing and field testing the system.

Conceptual Model of Performance-Based Accreditation

Performance-based school accreditation emphasizes the development of quality education through five performance characteristics of successful educational programs: active educational leadership, instructionally focused organization, effective instruction, change-inducing staff development, and positive school climate. School- and district- level indices of educational quality provide the focus of the performance-based system. The five performance characteristics define behaviors and activities that are believed to positively relate to the indices of educational quality. Within the respective performance characteristics, specific variables that make up characteristics are identified. Figure 1 depicts the conceptualization of performance-based school accreditation.

As indicated in figure 1, Quality Education forms the core of the conceptual model. The model depicts quality education as the positive effects of the five effective performance characteristics on the following functions of education: (a) promoting proficiency in basic skills for all students; (b) inducing positive attitudes toward learning; (c) providing continuing exposure to new knowledge; and (d) encouraging sustained involvement in successful learning experiences. Each of the educational functions is defined in terms that permit specific measurement of the degree of success in carrying out the functions. The first function, promoting proficiency in basic skills is defined as "the degree to which students actually master essential basic skills when selected background factors are taken into consideration,"


I. ACTIVE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
II. INSTRUCTIONALLY FOCUSED ORGANIZATION
Clear District Mission
Educationally Sound Budgetary Practices
Curricular Breadth and Depth
Instructionally Complementary Support Services
Focus on Continuous Improvement
Quality Oriented School Board
Performance Oriented Superintendent and Central Office
III. EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION
Tightly Coupled Curriculum
Long Range and Short Range Planning
Opportunity to Learn
Effective Professional Skills
Monitoring of Student Progress
VI. QUALITY EDUCATION
Proficiency in Basic Skills
Positive Attitudes Toward Learning
Continuing Exposure to New Knowledge
Sustained Involvement in Successful Learning Experiences
V. POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE
Safe, Orderly Environment
High Expectations for Student Performance
High Expectations for Staff Performance
Sense of Community and Collaboration
Rewards and Recognition for Success
IV. CHANGE-INDUCING STAFF DEVELOPMENT
Comprehensive in Scope
Active Administrative Support
Effective Implementation Strategies
Monitoring of Program Success
Instructionally Supportive Building-level Administration
Professionally Oriented Instructional Staff

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF

PERFORMANCE-BASED SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

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Figure 1

and is assessed by comparing school and district profiles of actual student performance levels on a statewide assessment of basic skills with profiles of anticipated student performance levels projected from information about students' past performances and socioeconomic backgrounds. The second function, inducing positive attitudes toward learning, addresses students' satisfaction with the school setting, sense of self-control and self-responsibility for learning, and continuing motivation to learn. These factors will be assessed with standardized attitudinal scales. The third function, providing continuing exposure to new knowledge, deals with the organization's ability to maintain learner to participation in the ongoing instructional program and is assessed through determining the percentage of enrollment (school and/or district) in average daily attendance. The final function, encouraging sustained involvement in successful learning experiences refers to the organization's success in retaining learners until the completion of an instructional program, and is indicated by the percentage of entering students who complete an elementary program or who graduate from a secondary program.

The first performance characteristic, Active Educational Leadership, is defined as "that activity on the part of some person or group which causes goals to be set, to be implemented, and to be achieved." Leadership variables identify the responsibilities and actions that should be taken by each organizational level in the district -- the local school board, the superintendent and central office, principals and teachers, and instructional support personnel.

The second performance characteristic, labeled Instructionally Focused Organization, represents "institutional structures and practices that promote effective and efficient instructional programs." Five performance variables appear in the Organization Characteristic. Clear district mission refers to the development of a shared sense of purpose that guides decision making and is reflected in district practices. Educationally sound budgetary practices refers to district efforts to actively support the instructional program through the budgeting process. Curricular breadth and depth deals with opportunities students have to participate in a wide range of learning experiences that are represented in the school's curriculum. Instructionally complementary support services addresses the role and function of effective programs in the areas of student support, library media and health and safety services. Focus on continuous improvement refers to district efforts to monitor and improve the educational impact of planned activities, programs, and services.

The third performance characteristic, Effective Instruction, is defined as "practices and behaviors designed to establish and implement classroom conditions that support effective student learning." This characteristic has five major variables. Tightly coupled curriculum relates to the development and use of a planned program of instructional management in a school. Long-range and short-range planning refers to efforts to establish instructional goals for the year which are translated into daily lesson plans. Opportunity

to learn relates to the allocation of sufficient instructional time in basic skills araes, the protection of allocated time from intrusions and interruptions, and the assurance that students are actively engaged in appropriate learning tasks during allotted instructional times. Effective professional skills outlines staff behaviors that promote student learning. Monitoring of student progress refers to providing regular feedback about performance to students and taking action to remediate any identified problems.

Change-Inducing Staff Development, the fourth performance characteristic, is defined as "a mandatory program of activities which is initiated by the school district, based on identified institutional needs, and designed to promote continued demonstration of the essential competencies and responsibilities necessary for the school district to meet its goals." The staff development characteristic has four performance variables. Comprehensive in scope refers to efforts to use the staff development program to address those areas where the district has identified a need for improvement of performance in order to accomplish planned district goals. Active administrataive support refers to evidence that the district's and school's administrations assume a leadership role in staff development activities. Effective implementation strategies refers to the methods used by the institution to carry out training and support activities. Monitoring of program success refers to the practice of evaluating the staff development program and making necessary adjustments.

The fifth performance characteristic is identified as Positive School Climate and is defined as "organizational norms, beliefs, and attitudes that influence student and staff performance." Climate consists of five variables. Safe and orderly environment refers to a positive, purposeful atmosphere and environment which is supportive of student learning. Standards addressing the school plant, the disciplinary system, student and staff attitudes about personal security at school, about learning, and about personal responsibility for behavior are included in this variable. High expectations for student performance addresses instructional practices that demonstrate the belief that all students can master essential objectives of each course or subject area. High expectations for staff performance refers to the belief shared by instructional staff that they are capable of helping all students to master essential basic skills, regardless of student background. Sense of community and collaboration refers to the promotion of open and cooperative working relationships among members of a school staff. Rewards and recognition refers to systematic efforts made by the district or school to recognize the accomplishments of student and of staff.

Attached to the performance variables in the five performance characteristics are standards that identify performance goals for each variable. Each standards has attached to it six performance indicators that describe different ways of attaining the stated goal. In some instances, the indicators are hierarchical, building a logical progression

from marginally acceptable performance to exemplary performance of the standard. In other cases, the indicators are cumulative, defining equally satisfactory types of performance without attaching an order of importance. Examples of these components of the model are in figure 2.

Performance indicators are intended to serve as guides to schools and school districts for achieving the goals for performance defined in the standards. Specific measures of each indicator that are now being developed will outline the type and amount of information that must be verified as evidence that a school or district has demonstrated an indicator.

The Performance-Based School Accreditation Process

Under the provisions of the Mississippi Education Reform Act, the Commission on School Accreditation, an appointed board that establishes and monitors all requirements on school accreditation, is to develop and implement a performance-based accreditation system that incorporates the recommendations of the Task Force. A tentative plan for such a system is described below.

When the performance-based accreditation system is implemented, all public school districts in Mississsippi must seek state accreditation. In order to determine the accreditation status of a school district, each of the district's schools will be given a numerical accreditation rating that reflects the performance level of the school.

Based on the results of an on-site performance review, schools may earn one point of credit for each indicator that is demonstrated, thus allowing the following scores and ratings

PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTIC: Instructionally Focused Organization

PERFORMANCE VARIABLE: Clear District Mission

PERFORMANCE STANDARD: There is a clear, shared statement of purpose that is the basis upon which most important educational decisions are made.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: There is evidence of any of the following:

(0) There is insufficient evidence of the presence of any indicators;

(1) District-level allocation of time to be spent in basic skills instruction;

(2) District-level specification of written instructional objectives in every subject at each grade level;

(3) District-level testing of student mastery of specified instructional objectives;

(4) Identification in the district curriculum guide of materials, supplies, and support services needed for basic skills instruction;

(5) District-level specification of performance-based promotion, retention, grading, and graduation requirements.

Example of the Nested Configuration
of the Performance-Based Accreditation Model

FIGURE 2

of performance for each standard:

0 -- unacceptable; no credit is earned
1 -- marginal; credit is earned for one indicator
2 -- minimal; credit is earned for two indicators
3 -- adequate; credit is earnerd for three indicators
4 -- above average; credit is earned for four indicators
5 -- Exemplary; credit is earned for all indicators

The ratings of standards for the performance variables of each characteristic will be combined to yield a total score for each characteristic. The characteristic scores will then be combined to produce an overall accreditation rating for each school. School districts will receive an accreditation rating that reflects the overall ratings of their individual schools, but can be rated no more than one point higher than the lowest rated school in the district.

An accredited status will be given to a school district in which each school receives an overall accreditation rating of at least one. An accredited-probationary status will be given to a school district in which a deficiency in meeting any of the performance standards and other requirements is found. In practical terms, a rating of zero on any performance standard constitutes a deficiency and will result in a district's being given a probationary status.

The local school board is required to take action when a district receives a probationary status. The board must develop, with assistance from the State Department of Education and subject to the approval of the Commission on School Accreditation, an improvement plan which stipulates what will be done to remove any zero accreditation ratings or other deficiencies and establishes a timeline for accomplishing the improvements. Progress in making improvements will be

regularly monitored and reported by commission staff from the State Department of Education.

A disaccredited status represents the loss of accreditation and is given to a school district on probation that fails to submit an improvement plan or that fails to successfully carry out an approved improvement plan. The Reform Act stipulates that state funds may be denied to any disaccredited school district until such time that the district takes action to correct deficiencies. Thus, a successfully implemented improvement plan is a prerequisite to regaining an accredited status.

The Educational Plan. School-level and district-level performance will be determined through external on-site evaluations that will be conducted on a time cycle of five years. At the beginning of an evaluation cycle, each school district will prepare an educational plan that outlines the means by which the district (and its individual schools) intends to achieve a quality educational program over the ensuing five years. The plan will address all five performance characteristics of the conceptual model and will specify the level of performance desired for each characteristic using a rating scale of zero to five. The plan's provisions must be used as the basis of operation for the district and may be modified to reflect internally or externally derived feedback about district or school performance ratings.

Specific requirements must be contained in the educational plan:

(a) an opinion survey which reflects student, staff,

and community attitudes or opinions concerning the district and/or its individual schools;

(b) a written mission statement which reflects the overarching purpose of the educational program and the ways in which the mission will affect district operations;

(c) an outline of the district's curriculum which indicates how the curriculum will be aligned from subject to subject and from grade to grade;

(d) an analysis of existing achievement data which reflects the status of student equity groups;

(e) a set of objectives specifying how the achievement of all students will be advanced in the district over the time period of the plan;

(f) a statement of performance-based standards for grading, promotion, and retention to be applied at designated program points and evidence that the standards are in effect;

(g) a statement of standards for graduation which stipulates a minimum level of basic skills to be achieved, a means of assessing students' basic skills levels, a listing of academic credits required for graduation, and a report of how students are meeting these standards;

(h) a description of district plans for reteaching students who fail to meet specified standards of performance at designated program points and evidence that the plans are in effect;

( ) a planned system for providing feedback to students

and their parents about students' levels of performance and evidence that this system is used;

(j) a statement of the responsibilities and required credentials of each professional staff position in the district including time to be spent in staff development activities;

(k) student, staff, and community demographic data as required.

On-site performance reviews will be conducted under the supervision of a staff member (designated as an accreditation auditor) in the State Department of Education. A group of external evaluators who have been selected, approved, trained, and assigned by the Commission on School Accreditation will carry out the performance reviews. Staff members of the State Department of Education will also conduct random audits of school district performance to determine that continuous efforts to improve performance are being made. A summary of the proposed process for performance-based accreditation is provided in figure 3.

Developing and Field Testing the Performance-Based Accreditation System

The Eduation Reform Act provided approximately three years for developing and field testing the performance-based accreditation system. Development began with the appointment of the Task Force in July 1983 and will conclude in early fall of 1985 when training programs for accreditation auditors and evaluators have been devised. Performance measures for all indicators are currently being drafted and will be compiled

into four instruments each employing one of the following procedures for assessing performance: document analysis, observation, interview, and questionnaires. Development of instruments has a projected completion date of August 1985. Once the instruments are completed, a process will be devised for training auditors and evaluators to consistently and accurately administer the instruments.

Other methods of verifying the five performance characteristics will be identified and compared with the instruments developed from the standards and indicators. Measures of school effectiveness currently under examination include the School Improvement Survey developed by Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory and the Profile of School Excellence developed by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory.[4]

Comparisons among instruments will analyze the amount of time for administration, the amount of information derived, the validity and the reliability of each instrument.

Methods of combining the performance characteristics and the educational functions into an index representing the level of quality of an educational program are being explored. Constrained facet analysis (Bessent et al, 1981); Bessent and Bessent, 1980) is a system for determining the relative efficiency with which individual schools produce defined outcomes (outputs) that takes into account the enabling resources (fixed and discretionary inputs) of the individual schools.

This approach is being investigated to determine its applicability to the performance-based accreditation model of quality education.

It is anticipated that field testing of the accreditation system will begin in September or October 1985 with on-site performance reviews of selected school districts. A ten percent sample of the total number of school districts in Mississippi, stratified to reflect achievement rankings, types, sizes and geographic locations in the state, will be included in the performance reviews. Analysis of the data collected in the performance reviews will seek to determine the validity of the proposed system through answering the following types of questions:

1) Do the components of the proposed system appear valid to Mississippi educators?
2) Is there a relationship between the ratings on performance characteristics received by schools and districts and their ratings on quality education indices?
3) Do the procedures which have been developed and the instruments used to evaluate standards work as they were expected to work?
4) Has the proper hierarchical order of indicators for each standard been identified?
5) Do the actual relationships among performance characteristics, variables, standards, and indicators reflect the conceptual model of quality education?

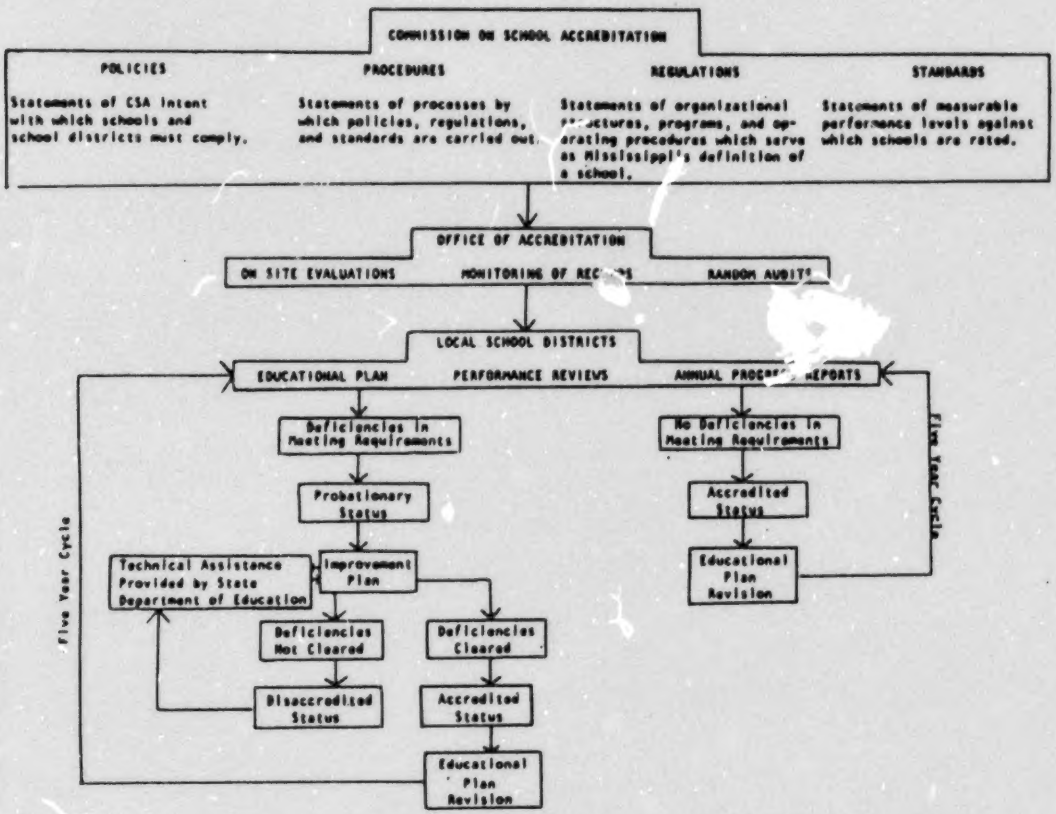
6) What is the most efficient way of verifying the five performance characteristics and of determining the quality of an educational program?

7) How may the Performance-Based Accreditation System be applied to ensure that it promotes improvements in school and student performance?

The results of field testing and data analysis will be used to revise the proposed accreditation system. It is hoped that the final version of Mississippi's Performance-Based Accreditation System will contain only those components whose relationship to student achievement has been demonstrated through the field testing process. Definitive answers to the research questions, however, may be delayed until the results of planned longitudinal studies of the impact of performance-based requirements on student performance are obtained.

Conclusions

Current directions in educational research are providing information about the characteristics of schools that are effective in promoting desired outcomes of schools. Mississippi is attempting to meet the call for improvement of educational quality by incorporating the findings of educational research into a performance-based model of school accreditation. If field testing establishes the validity of the proposed performance-based accreditation system, educational research findings will have been successfully applied to one state's vision of quality education.


COMMISSION ON SCHOOL ACCREDITATION
POLICIES
Statements of CSA intent with which schools and school districts must comply.
PROCEDURES
Statements of processes by which policies, regulations, and standards are carried out.
REGULATIONS
Statements of organizational structures, programs, and operating procedures which serve as Mississippi's definition of a school.
STANDARDS
Statements of measurable performance levels against which schools are rated.
OFFICE OF ACCREDITATION
ON SITE EVALUATIONS
MONITORING OF RECORDS
RANDOM AUDITS
LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
EDUCATIONAL PLAN
PERFORMANCE REVIEWS
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS
Deficiencies In Meeting Requirements
No Deficiencies In Meeting Requirements
Probationary Status
Accredited Status
Technical Assistance Provided by State Department of Education
Improvement Plan
Educational Plan Revision
Deficiencies Not Cleared
Deficiencies Cleared
Disaccredited Status
Accredited Status
Educational Plan Revision
Five Year Cycle
Five Year Cycle

THE PERFORMANCE-BASED SCHOOL ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Figure 3

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Notes

[1]Representative studies are: National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1983; Education Commission of the States, Action for Excellence: Report and Recommendations of the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, Denver, Colo.: the Distribution Center, 1983; Making the Grade: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1983.

[2]The more widely cited school effectiveness studies include: Brookover, Wilbur B. and Lezotte, Lawrence W. Changes in School Characteristics Coincident with Changes in Student Achievement. East Lansing: Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, 1979 (ED 181 005); Edmonds, Ron R. "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor." Educational Leadership 37 (October, 1979): 15-24: Edmonds, Ron R. "Some Schools Work and More Can." Social Policy 9(1979): 28-32; Rutter, Michael et al. Fifteeen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and their Effects on Children. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979; State of New York Department of Education. School Factors Influencing Reading Achievement: A Case Study of Two Inner City Schools. Albany: Office of Education Performance Rreview, March 1974 (ED 089 211); Weber, George. Inner-City Children Can Be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools. Washington, D. C.: Council for Basic Education, October 1971.

[3]Reviews of educational performance research include: Brookover, Wilbur B. et al. School Social Systems and Student Achievement: Schools Can Make a Difference. New York: Praeger, 1983; Cohen, Michael. "Effective Schools: Accumulating Research Findings." American Education (January-February 1982): 13-16; Mackenzie, Donald E. "Research for School Improvement: An Appraisal of Some Recent Trends." Educational Researcher 12 (April 1983): 5-17; Purkey, Stewart C. and Smith, Marshall S. "Effective Schools: A Rreview." The Elementary School Journal 83(March 1983): 427-452; Walberg, Herbert J. "What Makes Schooling Effective? A Synthesis and a Critique of Three National Studies." Contemporary Education 1(Spring 1982): 23-34. The October 1979 and December 1982 issues of Educational Leadership and the March 1983 issue of The Elementary School Journal are devoted to school effectiveness research.

[4]The School Improvement Survey was developed by Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory as a part of its Effective Schools Program. Information about the survey or the program is available from McREL, 2600 South Parker Road, Aurora, Colorado 80014. The Profile of School Excellence was developed by Appalachia Educational Laboratory to assess eleven characteristics of effective schools. For more information about the instrument, contact Appalachia Educational Laboratory, P. O. Box 1348, Charleston, West Virginia 25325.

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